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ABSTRACT

The pursuit of curriculum and the role of tradition in curriculum development are explored for Norway at the national-political level. The contexts of influence and of policy text production are considered. In Norway there currently exists a new type of nationally mandated curriculum guideline, a general policy curriculum document calling for a core curriculum of principles and aims, rather than a core of factual knowledge and skills. These revised curriculum guidelines are linked to new interests in the family situation, internationalization, the explosion of the mass media, and the emphasis on multiculturalism. Nevertheless, these developments stand in the cultural and knowledge traditions of Norwegian education. The paradoxes and promises of tradition are linked with all curriculum development, and are integral to the task of the curriculum developer. (Contains 16 references.) (SLD)

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REDEFINING THE CURRICULUM: THE PLACE AND ROLE OF TRADITION

The Case of the Norwegian "Core" Curriculum

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Introduction

In defining my topic, I found myself having options: to understand "tradition" as traditions in curriculum making or as tradition in a cultural, social or even political sense. I settled for the last one choosing as my topic the specific pursuit of curriculum and the place and role of tradition as part of this pursuit taking place in my country at the moment at the national-political level. My sources for identifying and analyzing this pursuit are especially three policy texts from the Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs: Education in Norway, Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education, and Principles and Guidelines for the Structure, Organization and Content of the 10-year Compulsory school, all dating from the period 1993-1994.

I will especially make three points:

1. My first point concerns what may be called the context of influence and the context of policy text production as an antecedent leading to a redefinition of curriculum documents in terms of tradition (Ball 1990, Bowe amd Ball 1992) 1.
2. My second point describes aspects of the substantive areas implied and the rhetoric or arguments involved, and adding some comments as to my understanding of promises and paradoxes involved.
3. My third point will be some remarks about what I see as especially problematic, but also hopeful.

It may be a matter of critique that my description is largely based on politically stated determining and influencing forces not paying more attention to underlying

economic and ideological structures and power relations. Further I run the danger of conveying a sort of askewed picture as the point of focus will be the question of tradition in the curriculum - leaving other important aspects aside.

Before moving on, however, it may be relevant just to make clear that in fact there does excist an entirely new type of nationally mandated curriculum guideline - a general policy curriculum document for primary, secondary and adult education alike - called a core curriculum - "core" used in a special way - denoting underlying principles and aims meant to be common to all schools as defined by central bodies and not a common core of factual knowledge and skills to be mastered by everyone. Since the sixties until this last one, the different curriculum guidelines have had the same format and type of structure and language. A completely new layout, extensive use of pictures, less expert language and even a return to oldfashioned expressions denoting virtues like "diligence", have made critical voices say that this is a complete break with the traditions of curriculum development in our country.

The changes are, however, also of a different kind. There is an explicit endeavour to link the essence and spirit of different Education Acts, and of recent white papers related to educational matters directly to the core curriculum and at the same time safeguarding the imbedded messages of former curriculum guidelines. This has resulted on one side in a presentation of overarching principles as well as of aims defined as a)something to work towards and as b) something one can know whether one approaches or not. And on the other side

of presenting the contents of the core curriculum under the following headings: The spiritual human being, the creative human being, the working human being, the liberally-educated human being,the social human being, the environmentally aware human being, and the integrated human being. Needless to say, the devolution of responsibility attached to the different levels of curriculum decision making is accentuated and, in fact, dramatic.

The Context of Influence and the Context of Policy Text Formulation

The stated justifications at the educational-political level for a new core- curriculum for primary, secondary and adult education are linked to changes in society and to changes in the school system. It is the changes in society that are especially of interest in this connection. [2]
These changes are stated as changes concerning :

- the family situation - including the personal aspect
- internationalisation - including an economic aspect
- mass media explosion - the question of values and norms
- multiculturalism - the question af cultural diversity and language minorities

There is nothing new or unique in this. It is on the contrary very similar to what is put forth in recent OECD/CERI (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Centre for Educational Research and Innovation) documents as common to the OECD countries (Skilbech 1990,OECD;CERI 1994).

A more close look into the policy documents reveals especially a high degree of concern related to purposes and priorities concerning what sort of people is needed in our world of today regarding these issues and that therefore the curriculum should contribute towards fostering.[3] This is where the cultural, social and political traditions enter in a very conspicuous way as a means towards attainment of educational aims and goals in a value perspective. [4]

In order, however, to explain how it was possible for this to happen it will be useful to look closer at the context that constituted the arena of formulation (Lindensjö & Lundgren 1986) or in other words the context of policy text production. And that relates to major changes having taken place in curriculum work on the national level. Most remarkable is the replacement of a traditional curriculum committee by three reference groups as consulting bodies or "working parties", and with the Minister of Education as the chief entrepreneur and author assisted by his staff. Especially one of the reference groups consisted of members representing different spheres of intellectual life and interest groups, and was in fact influential in producing and formulating the first policy document on the school - society relation - a document strong in restorative thinking. Educational experts were all together scarce - only one person in each group and not especially representing the "new progressives".[5] Representatives from the teacher unions were alltogether wanting. Summing up: an analysis of the context of policy text production makes evident a marked shift in what has been called the triangle of tension regarding influencing forces on school politics (Ball 1990). The professional

elements are squeezed out leaving some room for certain sociatal interest groups while the dominant deciding forces are political in nature.

Tradition as a means embedded in the curriculum - curriculum as intentional political action

The context of policy text production and formulation seems important to understand the role given to tradition in relation to values connected to especially four domains: the personal, the sociatal - democratic, the international and the multicultural and also to sources of knowledge e.g. traditions of knowledge production. In the following description of these I switch from an outside perspective to an inside one - using the words and formulations of the involved parties - presenting curriculum texts as intentional political action.

Personal Development, Democracy and Cultural Heritage

In relation to the personal development of the individual citizen the cultural heritage is considered as an important source in especially two respects. On the one side : It is argued that the development of individual identity occurs through becoming familiar with inherited forms of conduct, norms of behaviour and modes of expression. The curriculum should consequently elaborate and deepen the learner's familiarity with national and local traditions. The bonds between generations will further be closer when they share experiences and insights, stories, songs and legends.

On the other side: the curriculum must play a leading

role in passing on the common heritage, the culture all must be familiar with if society is to remain democratic. The link between the maintainance of democray and cultural heritage and a common knowledge base is further elaborated by stressing a common national subject matter. There is a strong political will to extend and gradually widen the common national subject matter as the pupils move upwards through the different grades and this common national syllabus is meant to be clearly specified for the different subjects (KUF 1994c). This may seem a paradox related to a democratic development of school and society because it clearly diminishes the role of the teachers and the students in deciding what to teach and learn. The main arguments, however , are related to the question of equity and equal rights and to a more subtle line of thinking: In an increasingly specialized society common frame of references must be the property of all people to escape differences in competence that may otherwise surface into social inequality and be as it is expressed " abused by undemocratic forces". This last hint relates the way I see it to political, religious as well as ideological fundamentalism.

It is argued that those who do not share the background information taken for granted in public discourse, will often overlook the points in question and miss the meaning. It is underscored that newcomers to the country are more easily incorporated into our society when implicit features of our cultural heritage are made clear and exposed to view, and that knowledge about past events and achievements unite people over time.

Examples given of common contexts as references for

understanding encompass e.g historical events, constitutional principles, the classics of literature and the symbols used on weather charts. Without this overarching comprehension it is argued that it will be difficult for non-specialists to participate in decisions that affect their lives underlining the fact that the more specialized and technological our culture becomes, the more difficult it will be to communicate across professional boundaries (KUF 1994a 26-27).[6] So far the picture looks bright and promising. The way it is interpreted, misinterpreted, discussed and attacked in academic and public debate, however,gives the dark side: a fear of a return to basics and to theory at the expence of the weakest and less gifted pupils.

Multiculturalism and the Appreciation of Tradition

The tensions and dilemmas are even more evident in relation to multiculturalism. On the one side it is maintained that our domestic history and distinctive features are our contribution to the cultural diversity of the world. Our cultural heritage must therefore be central as an integral part of the mandated curriculum. On the other side there is a general understanding that the ethnic and cultural diversity of today's society must be visible in the curriculum. The national curriculum documents provide curriculum guidelines as steering documents for the teaching of language minorities and multicultural education as well as safeguarding the cultural diversity by mandating aspects of different ethnic cultures to be made visible across different school subjects and themes. The Sami language and culture are e.g part of this common heritage

which Norway has a special responsibility to safeguard. Aspects of Sami traditional culture should consequently be introduced in the school subjects like music(like the "joik"), sports (throwing the "lasso"), and natural science (e.g.the balance of the ecosystem related to reindeer keeping).

In addition the school system embraces many pupils from groups which in our country constitute minority cultures and languages. The curriculum must therefore, according to the political intentions, convey knowledge of other cultures and take advantage of the potential for enrichment that minority groups and Norwegians with another cultural heritage represent.

What I see as a paradox related to statements like this one , is that main terms of reference for cultural heritage in the curriculum are Christian and humanistic values - and that it may look like the schools are expected to inculcate a religious and humanistic- based monoculture at a time when the need to create scope for pluralism seems evident (cp. Englund 1994). And further: a main impression derived from the curriculum texts is that the ideal is that the non-Norwegian speaking pupil "grows into" the Norwegian society in every sense.

Internationalization and the Appreciation of Tradition

It is maintained that a growing internationalization and influences from the gobal community demand heightened awareness of own tradition and values, and that the increasing specialization and complexity of the global community

requires a deepened familiarity with the main currents and traditional tones of the national culture. The expansion of knowledge demands heightened awareness of the values that must guide our choices. A main point is that when transitions are massive and changes rapid it becomes even more pressing to emphasize historical orientation, national distinctiveness and local variation to safeguard our identity. It is also a point raised that our contribution to the global community relates to tradition in specific ways (KUF. pp 28-29).

It is, according to my view, a paradox that internationalization to such a great extent is seen in relation to tradition and not in view of a future vision or at least in a future perspective, and that the answer to our existensial societal and global problems lies to such a great extent in the virtues of the past and in our national heritage.

I recently read a report dealing with the lack of global perspectives related especially to the "third world" in the new 1994-syllabus for the upper secondary school. And it is argued this may derive from the new general core curriculum where concepts like our inherited common culture and traditions are repeatedly mentioned without drawing a connecting line to other countries and cultures and without revealing the negative sides. The report concludes that the result is a chauvinistic world view (Nordkvelle 1993).

Knowledge Traditions

In relation to knowledge and for choosing the content, the curriculum, three different traditions are recognized and in

principle they are given equal status. It is explicitly stated that the curriculum must build upon and demonstrate the contributions of the past concerning 1)innovative work, 2) intellectual inquiry and 3)artistic expression (KUF, 1994 p.12-13) The promise of future advancement is linked to familiarity with the past in all three domains.

1. The first tradition is characterized as experienced-based knowledge -derived from practical work and learning through experience. Especially the aspect of improvement by trial and error and on countless contributions are underscored. In this relation the concept of tacit knowledge lodged in the hands and mediated by use is brought to the forefront.
2. The second tradition relates to school subjects where new knowledge is won through theoretical development, tested by logic and facts, experience, evidence and research.
3. The third tradition is the cultural tradition, mediated as it is expressed, "by body and mind and embedded in arts and crafts, in language and literature, in theatre, song , music, dance and athletics" (KUF 1994, p. 13."

What is interesting is that the three modes of knowledge all are treated as traditions and that the promise of future development and improvement is linked to familiarity not only with the manifest results of the past but with the continuous development and antecedents of today's status quo .[7]

It is promising that it is stressed that in many trades and professions all three traditions interlace.
It is , however, not so promising that the tendency towards

more emphasis on traditional school subjects linked to the academic disciplines works counter these underlying principles.

In the ongoing curriculum development work enough attention is not given to all threee aspects of knowledge.[8]

Another paradox may be linked to the importance of pupils not perceiving science and its theories as eternal and absolute truth. The curriculum must find that difficult balance between respect for established knowledge and the critical attitude that is necessary for developing new learning and for organizing information in new ways. Education instill an awareness of the limitations of the current body of knowledge, and the realization that predominant doctrines can block free insight.

Another paradox is linked to the understanding of our technological heritage. Familiarity with our technological heritage - the easing of life and the improvement it has furnished, but also the dangers technological inventions have introduced must be an essential element of the curriculum. Perhaps two aspects are of most importance:
the relationship between natural science, ecology and ethics and the interplay between economy, ecology and technology . The paradox and promise of tradition are embedded in the conflicts of interests of these relations especially.

DISCUSSION

Amelioration of society through schooling

My first comments are linked to the strong emphasis on the

role of schooling and the curriculum for the amelioration of society embedded in the curriculum documents. In my country we have an expression denoting schooling as anti- current culture , current culture denoting decay - and it is a tradition to look upon the role of schooling as important in this respect.

Do we see hope - does a curriculum policy document like this one convey promise or is it a paradox to expect that schooling may yield more than the society it is placed in. I see, however, a challenge in this - it is a challenge to find new ways in our curriculum thinking, new modes of thought and action.[9] It is in fact a paradox that a document like this amounts to no more than an array of slogans, which will acquire meaning only if it is put into action.

The problematics of value teaching

The American curriculum professor Arthur Foshay wrote me after he had read the English version of the core-curriculum that he envied us the possibility to include matters of spiritual, moral, creative, cooperative and ecological nature, and he was curious how this curriculum guideline would be tried put into action. He also sent me an article: "Values as Object Matter: the Reluctant Pursuit of Heaven." His letter and his article made me think and made me realize that what it is all about is the teaching of values - it is in fact an effort to teach values directly. A couple of weeks ago I had to write a comment to the second draft of the different subjects' syllabi for our basic 10-year school, and found an occasion to underline the importance of stressing verbs used

in connection with values as aims - indicating ways of teaching values suggested by Foshay.[10]

The symbolic power of linking the past and the national

To be honest I find the overwhelming emphasis placed on the national heritage rather disturbing. The symbolic power of linking values to the past and to the national is, however, significant, and it has been exploited dramaturgically and rhetorically - also by the minister of education like launching the core - curriculum sitting on an old school desk and making the audience sing a wellkonown and rather sentimental folksong (Reite 1995).

The rhetorics of curriculum reform

What I also see as an overarching paradox is the persistent belief on the part of the curriculum authorities and also in public debate in the role and place of curriculum documents to initiate and implement a curriculum reform that will make people different and the world a better place to be.
At the same time there are, however, signs embedded on the national and local arena that signal a growing awarenes by of the complexities and problems related to the implementation and realization of curriculum reform.

One is the pronounced statement that the curriculum guidelines and not textbooks or tests shall decide what knowledge is of most worth - realizing , however the enormous influence of especially textboks in the past. Another is the

seriousness and insistence upon moral and ethical responsibility on national, regional and local levels related not only to national welfare but to the existential and global crises of today.

A third sign is the turning to curriculum theory to find help to make sense of the events and confusion of curriculum practice. And that relates to my concluding remarks.

Concluding remarks : the promise and paradox of the task of the curriculum researcher

Critical analysis of national curriculum policies - including critical scrutiny of policy texts is one of the tasks of the curriculum researcher. Another is constructive contributions to strategies for identifying curriculum problems and for alternative strategies and solutions to these problems.
A promise and a paradox in the present Norwegian situation is the turning to curriculum theory on the part of national, regional and local school authorities as a means of elucidating the situation and finding alternative answers to curriculum problems. The lack of implementation of state mandated curriculum reform has apart from legitimating local curriculum work, lead to a search for theories illuminating the nature of curriculum problems. The thinking of Joseph J. Schwab, especially linked to his essays on "the Practical" has proved influencial as part of research studies and as an approach in curriculum work in different contexts both in and out of school settings.

I will give just another example and it is related to William A. Reid's thinking concerning different competing curriculum

interests and the resolving through curriculum deliberation into a common public interest (Reid 1992, 1994). In presenting these thoughts to curriculum committees at national level, to administrators and teachers at regional and local levels, and also to curriculum students and professors in colleges and universities, I find a growing understanding of the complexities, paradoxes, but also of the promises and possibilities related to the curriculum field. Reid once stressed that we need to realize the incremental nature of curriculum change. "There will be change , but in an incremental way". I see in Reid's work within the curriculum field a thinking that gives a decisive contribution in the direction of incremental change.

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NOTES

1. Last year William A. Reid received Division B Award for distinguished contributions to curriculum and his book the Pursuit of Curriculum: Schooling and the Public Interest was published the same year.The symposium was in honour of these events.

2. The stated reasons for curriculum change related to changes in the school system are :

- introduction of a program for afterschool activities
- lowering the school starting age to six years
- a three year upper secondary compulsory education for all
- the efforts towards a pedagogically more flexible school system (making more effective teaching and learning possible in view of rapidly changing national and international conditions related to what is important to teach and learn - "What knowledge is of most worth"

3. Like what kind of people do we want:

The aim of education is to furnish children, young people and

adults with the tools they need to face the tasks of life and its challenges together with others --- to provide learners with the capability to take charge of themselves and their lives --- qualify for productive participation in today's labour force, supply basis for later shifts to not envisaged occupations --- develop skills needed for specialized tasks and provide a general level of competence --- train young people to make sound choices and to take responsibility, and to assess the effects of their actions on others and evaluate them in terms of ethical principles."

"The aim of education is to expand the individual's capacity to perceive and to participate, to experience, to empathize and to excel." (KUF, 1994a p. 5)

In the case of internationalizaton :

- to combine technical know-how with human insight
- to develop a workforce that is highly qualified and versatile
- to combine an international outlook with a deepened familiarity of national traditions
- to make it possible for Norway to excert international influence in especially two domains: developing the common welfare of the world, and protect the environment of the world

(KUF 1994a, pp.28-29)

An in relation to multiculturalism: There is a broad understanding that the ethnic and cultural diversity of today's society must be visible in the curriculum. The national curriculum documents provide curriculum guidelines as steering documents for the teaching of language minorities and multicultural education as well as safeguarding the cultural diversity by mandating aspects of different ethnic cultures to be made visible across different school subjects and themes.

4. I will just quote regarding values and norms:

Education in Norway is based on fundamental Christian and humanistic values demanding and fostering tolerance, equality, human rights and rationality, enphasizing charity, brotherhood and hope.
Children and adolescents must be made to understand moral claims and the canons that are valid in society and allow them to inform their conduct.
Education must clarify and justify ethical principles and norms. Pupils must be confronted with choices that are tested against the norms on which the school and society as a whole are built. And educators as role models should lead the way by their example. There should be close interaction between upbringing at home and the education provided by the school. (KUF, 1994a.pp.7-8)

5. I was myself the only "curriculum professor" on the reference group appointed for the 10 year basic school

6. Expressed in terms of policy:

Common background knowledge is thus at the core of a national network of communications between members of a democratic society. It is the common frames of reference which make it possible to link what one sees, reads to a shared tacit mode of thinking. It makes it possible to fathom complex messages and to interprete new ideas, situations and challenges. KUF 1994a p.26-27

7.- to give a quotation:

> Common to all three traditions is that they fuse the human gifts of creating and experiencing. They show how pursuits in different areas have produced works of lasting value. They highlight the rich heritage from the past in our custody and they display mankind's scope for continuing progress. (p. 14)

8. My comment is based on studying the draft proposal for the syllabi of the different subjects.

9. Cp. e.eg. The curriculum matrix presented by William Doll in his book A post-Modern perspective on Curriculum (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University Press) See also Reid 1993 and 1994.

10. Foshay suggests especially four modes of teaching: by accretion, by traumatic experience, by association and by teaching vicariously(Foshay 1993, pp. 50-51)